Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month: Xbox Ambassadors Share Their Stories

Community Fifthpaw May 3, 2021

It’s May, which marks the start of **Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month**!

As a fellow Asian myself, I’d like to acknowledge that there are… ***a lot*** of us. We’re everywhere! And that is such a **beautiful** thing. However, with there being so many of us, the experiences each of us go through are also vastly different. Whether you’re a southeast Asian like me or a Pacific Islander, we all have our own language, heritage, identity, and struggles. It’s important to not lump all of us under one or two broad categories.

But it’s important we all have a **chance to be heard**.

Highlighting and amplifying community voices is core to the Xbox Ambassadors community. So, in celebration, we asked those who identify as Asian or Pacific Islander how games with diverse representation have impacted them and to share their own stories about being a member of a gaming community.

We received hundreds of responses and, with much consideration, selected the following to share.

Here’s to all of you:

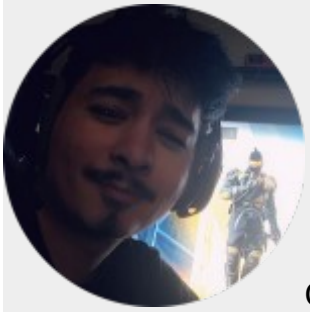
Blackipino Jay

Playing as an Asian character feels right at home, whether it's infiltrating a crime syndicate as Wei Shen in *Sleeping Dogs* or flying across rooftops as Faith in *Mirror's Edge*. The only downside was that there were no characters that were Filipino or Southeast Asian. However, playing as Ryu Hyabusa in the *Ninja Gaiden* series brings me back to my favorite gaming memories.

I loved playing the OG Ninja Gaiden games with my brother on our NES, but I lost my mind when the series came back on the original Xbox system. Watching Hyabusa jump from a 8-bit system to flipping and slashing on my Xbox felt unreal. The abilities, story, and difficulty not only reaffirmed my love for Ninja Gaiden, but was the beginning of my love for gaming on Xbox. Now with some games, like *Fallout* and *Cyberpunk*, I can create a character that looks as close to me as possible!

Finding new communities to play with is rewarding. I have found a lot of lifelong friends from random multiplayer encounters or by joining a group with Xbox's social resources.

KETO SAIBA



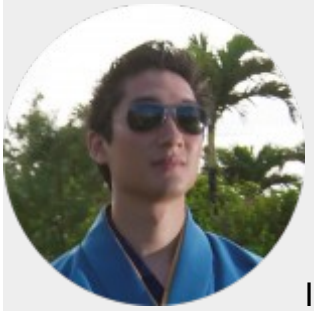
Games featuring Asian/Pacific Islander characters were pretty much what got me into gaming in general. It started with my love for fighting games, with martial arts being a huge part of Asian culture, growing up I saw characters in my favorite fighting games like Liu Kang and Kung Lao from *Mortal Kombat*, Ling Xiaoyu and Marshall Law from *Tekken*, and so on.

It inspired me because I saw what they were doing on screen and I thought "Wow, they're literally practicing the same moves as I do when I go to training". Seeing that publicized in a media outlet as big as these games was

sort of surreal. This doesn't just apply to the past. Nowadays I find myself really enjoying Ubisoft's *Rainbow Six Siege* and seeing Asian characters Like Hibana/Echo and Lesion/Ying being given the spotlight and portrayed so well not just culturally (Hibana's elite skin is a prime example) but also as these super cool Operators in Siege really does put a smile to my face.

Gaming communities have impacted my life by giving me a positive outlet to share with people from around the world who enjoy the same things as I do. Essentially an environment free from judgement, regardless of where you are from.

Ackee on Walkee



It's always great to see a cool, strong, AAPI character in a game, and not just one that dies right away to propel the story, or who is a stereotype (e.g., awkward hacker) or is there just for comedy. Two examples come to mind: Wei Shen from *Sleeping Dogs*, and Jonah from the recent *Tomb Raider* games.

Both are smart, relatable, and "real," without relying on being AAPI to become a character. As much as I didn't enjoy the game, I also feel that Hopper from *Homefront* deserves a mention: there is a scene where some characters berate him for being Korean, and he responds that he is American. This is something that I live with constantly and feels especially relevant today with what is going on.

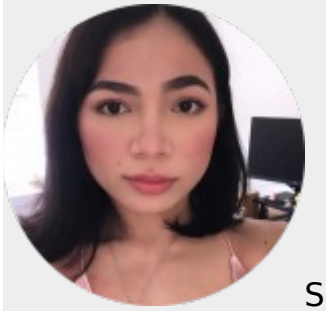
Being able to meet other people who are interested in the same games as me and care about me as a gamer, rather than what I look like, what language(s) I speak, etc. is pretty neat. From my voice, all you can tell is that I am American, and that, along with my skill (or lack thereof) in the game, will be my first impression.

Dardor45

I have to say that there are so few games with AAPI leads that I could not think of any when I first read this question. Outside of fighting games which tend to have stereotypical/racist/hyper-sexualized caricatures, the remaining Asian leads all tend to be ninja or samurai, which really does not do much in the way of promoting diversity. Putting “video games with Asian lead” into a search bar brings up *Prey*, which I’ve never played since I don’t play horror games, but more importantly, it came out almost four years ago and is somehow still a top result.

Thankfully, I can create Asian-looking characters in most character creators for RPGs or looters shooters but it just isn’t the same as having a title character be Asian. It’s very disappointing overall, especially when we have so many game studios out of Asia.

SniperMeow



Seeing more and more Asian protagonists in video games, particularly for English-speaking audiences, has been really exciting and amazing for me. Actually having the chance to experience a game and playing as someone who looks like you, an actual character not one you’ve customized, is so very rewarding.

I’ve always been so prideful of my own culture and heritage but being represented as an Asian American woman in movies and in games is so unfortunately rare. Having games finally representing folks that look like me help to reinforce the idea that people like me actually matter, that we exist, and we are important— our stories are important.

I’ve had a variety of experiences in different gaming communities, but for those that I have stayed with, I’ve always been so widely accepted and supported. Most of my loved ones and most of my closest friends are all gamers. I’m really glad to be a part of this community.

cbkXtekeeez

Video games that have featured Asian/Pacific Islander characters have always been close to my heart. Growing up I always loved watching ninjas, samurai, and dragons. Having games that showcase some cultural backgrounds that are close to your own is an amazing feeling. It's like having an art show where all kinds of people can come and appreciate the hard work and traditions that are tied to Asian/Pacific Islander culture.

Gaming communities have given me an outlet where I could be myself when I didn't want to be around people. It allowed me to meet many interesting people that I normally wouldn't have been able to socialize with. These gaming communities bring many different people together from different walks of life and lets us all enjoy something we all love.

bangoMANGO91

It's great to see games tell stories from multiple lenses! It's one thing to be a Spartan on a *Halo* ring, but another to experience a story centered around a Pacific Islander. I have yet to find a favorite story myself but seeing the shift in the industry is promising as both an Asian and Pacific Islander myself.

The sense of joy and connection brought about by gaming communities is both unique and yet so inviting. I just recently started diving more into the vast number of Xbox communities and see so much love and genuine fans of the brand! It's inspired me to start my own podcast to grow such a community on the islands of Hawaii.

Grand Pugilist

I haven’t played any games featuring Filipino characters. Most of the games out there have strong Chinese influences but that’s about it. Southeast Asians are rarely depicted in games and much more rarely as good characters. I would like to play games featuring Filipinos, much like our clamor for Ubisoft to make a historically inspired game about pre-colonial Philippines.

Gaming communities can have positive, negative and even neutral effects for interacting with its members. It really depends on what the person posts. As a Filipino gamer, only local gaming communities have provided a more relatable experience since very few international lobbies share the unique experiences of Filipinos in gaming.

Thank you once again to everyone for sharing their stories this Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month! We understand it is not always easy to share personal experiences publicly, so we really do appreciate every single one.